The Sugar Mafia, A Mysterious Inner Harbor Shooting, Jess's Mental Struggles, and New Friendship

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The Sugar Mafia, A Mysterious Inner Harbor Shooting, Jess's Mental Struggles, and New Friendship

by lefemmerouge2

Summary

Jess had come to see the majestic tall ships across Inner Harbor like thousands of other onlookers. She quickly takes a break inside of one of the pavilions to buy a boba tea and a sweet crepe. She is overjoyed. However, she soon finds herself caught up in a mysterious murder, horrifying her to no end. She is paralyzed with fear and anxiety over what could happen if the shooter finds her, believing she is weak and could have done more to save stop this tragedy, even though she has no superpowers. Some time later, a young Japanese girl and her two detective colleagues, her father and brother-of-sorts, appear. The girl soon comforts her when no one else will, bringing them together and deepening their bond...

Notes

Happy July 6th! In my end notes for my fic "Hailey, Jess, and What Happens in Metropolis" (listed in the inspirations and part one of this informal series) I said that an admin of "Disability Pride Bingo" had told me, when I asked about a crossover, "Crossover fic is more than welcome! As long as the focus is primarily on the DC character :)." The admin later said they were looking forward to this fic, saying "Then you're good as long as it fits one of the prompts. I can't wait to see it!". Sadly, the notes for the first version of this fic were lost when my new computer decided it was time to go to a black screen after I opened a webpage to Sail250, the event centering around tall ships coming to Baltimore (some articles about that have been added to the inspirations), although I'm not exactly sure that was the reason. Luckily, I broadly remembered what I aimed to focus on there, and used it to move forward with this fic. As per the rules of this collection, this fic falls into the prompts for PTSD and Anxiety, with a focus on Jessica "Jess" Cruz, a character who struggles with social anxiety and agoraphobia, while having some violence but in a canon-typical way. It also takes place at Harborplace, specifically at Light Street Pavilion, which I visited relatively recently (as I was in town wanting to see the tall ships for the militaristic/jingoistic Sail250), as it seemed very eerie.

Without getting into the weeds of that, it seemed like a perfect place to set this fic. Skimming the Harborplace Wikipedia page, there was only one instance of a murder at Harborplace listed there, in fall 2025. So, I used my imagination to build out this story, plus leaning into the shocking murder aspect as epitomized in Detective Conan, which I've been watching recently for the first time. It is a deeply flawed due to its sexism, heteronormative values, and gaslighting. Despite that, there is value in it as a (murder) mystery and thriller series, with humorous, interesting, campy, and educational elements which make the perpetrators often

sympathetic. At the same time, I'm glad I never watched the dub, as that would clearly make me angry with all the changes to Americanize the story so it was supposedly more "accessible."

Apart from that, this is the second fic to use the "My Adventures with Green Lantern (Cartoon)" (MAWGL) fandom because, as I said in the A/N for "Hailey, Jess, and What Happens in Metropolis," My Adventures with Superman (MAWS) and MAWGL are in the same universe, with Jess's cameo is like a mini-back door pilot to MAWGL, hence it makes sense to add it here. Writing this fic was, admittedly, a bit of a challenge, but I did my best to fulfill it. I wanted to give more a spotlight to Ran, than Conan, as I feel that she is as smart, if not more, than Conan. I may write more about Detective Conan by itself later, if I have the time/interest. Coming back to Jess and her anxiety, this fic is inspired by "the way she paints the world" (by likewinning), "By Sheer Will" (by Little_Firestar84), "Is It a Date?" (by Bara_no_Uta), "you're the sun (and i'm crashing into you)" (by Crystalinastar), "Gold Light, Green Light" (by Kungfu_Blaziken, particularly chapters 17 and 18), and "Living in the Limelight" (by DMenace). Other fics may be used as inspiration for future stories I write about Jess as she is depicted in MAWS/MAWGL.

This fic was cross-posted on Squidge World, Quotev, and Adult Fanfiction. It will later be cross-posted/uploaded on Internet Archive.

As always, comments, and concrit, are welcome.

See the end of the work for more notes

- Inspired by Facing Fear and Anxiety: Jessica Cruz and her identity as a mental health role model by Jamie Ryder [on The Comic Philosopher]
- Inspired by Crowds pack Baltimore’s Inner Harbor for Sail250 by Fern Shen [Baltimore Brew]
- Inspired by The first tall ship approaches the Inner Harbor, a towering, majestic sight by Mark Reutter [for Baltimore Brew]
- Inspired by Photo Tour of the Harborplace Pavilions at the Inner Harbor by Kevin Lynch [for SouthBMore]
- Inspired by Hailey, Jess, and What Happens in Metropolis by lefemmerouge2
- Inspired by the way she paints the world by likewinning
- Inspired by By Sheer Will by Little_Firestar84
- Inspired by Is It a Date? by Bara_no_Uta
- Inspired by you're the sun (and i'm crashing into you) by Crystalinastar
- Inspired by Gold Light, Green Light by Kungfu_Blaziken
- Inspired by Living in the Limelight by DMenace

Jess had come to see the tall ships. Crowds had packed the Inner Harbor. They were drawn to the waterfront as they walked along the famed promenade. She went inside a pavilion to get something to eat. She knew there was a place on the second floor which sold sweet crepes and boba tea. Those were two of her favorite things. As she walked up the stairs of this indoor shopping mall, she quickly reached the store aptly named Baltimore Crepes and Treats. Everything was reasonably priced. She quickly purchased a crepe, filled with yogurt and strawberries, and grabbed a boba tea in her other hand. Happily smiling, she walked around like there she had no care in the world. She was glad it wasn't too crowded, because if it was, she might have left the Inner Harbor all together. As she went down the stairs and held onto the railing, a man was walking the opposite direction. She waved at him and he nodded. She had almost reached the door to the street level when she happened to turn around.

She saw that the man had gotten into an argument with another person over something she couldn't quite make out. "Baltimore will never be safe from the Sugar Mafia. Your new Harborplace *will not* save you from crime. You are all complete fools," the assailant said, then pulled out his handgun. He pushed the other person down the stairs and started rapidly firing his gun over and over. The man quickly slumped on the stairs. One bullet, which went through him, and into the nearby wall, caused blood to slightly splatter, and coated part of her sneakers. Staring down and immediately spotting what was on her shoes, she loudly screamed, her voice echoing across the pavilion. She was utterly terrified and did know what in the world to do with herself.

Only moments later, her boba tea and crepe fell onto the floor, creating a huge mess of yogurt, strawberries, tea, and tapioca balls. This made her extremely sad. She had been really looking forward to having them! With all the commotion, the assailant escaped and faded into the crowd. Jess was left there to process everything alone. She knew how it would look, but she couldn't stay there. She wasn't thinking clearly. She ran out of the doors and desperately searched for a place to hide, before quickly deciding to come back inside. It was safer there, she gathered. She couldn't be out there among people, not looking like this. She only showed *a certain side of herself* to others. She gave the impression she was just a plucky, lovable, and relatable teen and nothing more than that.

Somehow, she made her way into the girls bathroom, where she quickly hid in one of the stalls, then locked the door. She was shaking. She wondered why this was happening to her, *of all people*. Why had she decided to come there in the first place? She had made a grave error. She should have stayed at home and away from all these people. She was afraid what might happen to her next. What if the killer found her? What if he killed her *next*? She was incredibly fearful and she felt completely hopeless. She almost wanted to stay there and not leave. Putting her hands over her ears, she huddled on top of the toilet seat and tried to calm herself down. Surely, she was anxious about going into crowded or enclosed spaces, but this was different. She wasn't sure what to do.

She remembered, *yet again*, why she hated places like this. She couldn't deal with people, especially not this many. She was glad that music wasn't blaring or signs seemed to be screaming at her. Maybe if she had been with friends. Then... it came back to her: she didn't have *any* friends. She had some a while ago, but they turned out to be utter vipers who

sucked her dry. When she realized what they were doing to her, they discarded her like she was a piece of trash in a dumpster engulfed in flame. She obviously wanted to have fun, just like everyone else does. But, why was it so hard? Why couldn't she be normal? Was there something wrong with her? She almost thought that there was. Her whole body soon became covered in beads of sweat, with the cold sending shivers across her brownish skin.

Why was so she weak? Why hadn't she protected that man? She felt completely alone like there was no one there to help her. Maybe she should just go back home, stay there, and never leave again. She'd be safe. She didn't need to be in the wider world. Her breathing became heavy as she kept trembling. She became aware of everything around her and within her. She felt insecure. She knew deep down that everyone had their own internal battles. This felt very personal, like it could cause her to break down into nothing if she wasn't careful, and collapse under the pressure of it all.

She wasn't sure if it truly was that dire or if this was all just in her head. Perhaps she was nothing more than a ball of anxiety. Pain coursed through her body. She clutched her stomach. She felt like she was hurting all over. She was in utter agony as she continued to shake. Tears were streaming down her cheeks. She believed she had messed everything up and that she had been wrong all along. She stayed huddled in a fetal position, tightly hugging her knees. Maybe she was overthinking things. Maybe the people who told her that she was *a bit of a disaster* were right. These thoughts swirled in her head.

She tried her best to concentrate and repeat words over and over, until she calmed herself down, so she could regain her strength. Undoubtedly, she had a lot on her mind. She knew that she wasn't her anxieties or her fears, even though it sometimes felt that way. She had to keep reminding herself of that. Her breathing started to level out. She was nervous, but she'd get through this. She had before. She could do it again. She was stronger than what was pulling her down. She couldn't let it take over. She could win against it. She assured herself that she'd be okay. Her shaking started to subside. She believed that she could help others despite the previous sneers she had gotten. She could ground herself. Of course, she didn't want to give people false hope. Even so, she wanted to be confident in herself. She hadn't fully returned to normal when she heard some footsteps nearby. They weren't in the bathroom itself but in the adjoining hallway. She started to get nervous once again. Who was it? What did they want? If it was *that man*, she could do nothing. She'd be a victim just like anyone else. She wondered if it was all lost. Could she get through this? At that point, she heard the bathroom door start to open.

Suddenly, someone entered the bathroom. They called, saying "is anyone there?" in Japanese. She only knew what it meant from watching her share of anime, since she was very nerdy, after all. She wondered if she could be honest with this person, who sounded like she was her own age at first, even though she was actually a few years older than her, as she was sixteen and Jess was only thirteen. Could she be trusted? She didn't know. The person spoke again. "If...someone is here...please answer...we can't solve this without you." Jess didn't feel she had enough energy to open the stall door, so she started sobbing. Her words came out between her sobs. "I know you want me to help...but I'm not up to it...I just want to go home...everyone will think that I did it...that's *how it always is* with people like me..." The woman suddenly started speaking in English, realizing that this girl was terrified. She *needed*

her, as there was no guarantee that the cameras in this shopping mall, which was scheduled for demolition later that year, even worked anymore. Perhaps they could even catch the perp.

"It's okay, miss. I know you are scared. I get it. I have felt the same way so many times...no one will hurt you...*I promise you that*." She paused. "I'm Ran Mouri. What's your name?" she calmly asked. Jess unlocked the stall door and carefully opened it, only a crack. This was hard for her to do. "I'm Jessica Cruz...People call me Jess. Are you absolutely sure that the bad man is gone...the man who killed that other man?" She nodded. With that, she swung open the door so quickly that Ran could barely comprehend it. She nearly sprinted right into Ran, put her arms around her, and started bawling her eyes out. While it might seem unusual for Jess to do this since she had only just met this girl, she felt comfortable and at peace being around her. It was touching how much this girl cared about her, even though she was an absolute stranger. Her features softened. She felt more relaxed and reassured. Her previous anxiety started to fade. Only a small number of other people had the same effect on her.

"I was so scared...I don't want to come back here again..." she started to say. Ran gave her classic smile. They stayed like this for a while. Ran could tell that Jess *needed it.* After about ten minutes had passed, she firmly held Jess's hand, and guided her back into the hallway where her detective colleagues were. One was a lumbering Japanese man named Kogoro Mouri, and another was the little annoying kid named Conan Edogawa, who had a secret about himself he had told few others, apart from his neighbor and inventor, Doctor Agasa. "This is Jessica Cruz," she told Kogoro and Conan. She told them what Jess had revealed to her in the bathroom. With Conan scratching his chin, he began his deductions about the shooting. Jess blurted out what she saw, just to get it off her chest.

"I-I-I...was coming back from that store," she started to say, pointing at Baltimore Crepes and Treats, then continued. "With a crepe and boba tea in my hands, I was almost about to leave when I waved to this one man...I looked up...and he and another man were having an argument." She recalled the rest of the scene, what the man had said, and what else she'd seen. Thanks to this, Conan was starting to put it all together. As he did this, Ran pulled her to the same place she had bought the boba tea and sweet crepe. She pulled out her wallet. Unfortunately, she didn't have many U.S. dollars, only Japanese yen notes. When the cashier told her she didn't have enough, she pulled him close and pointed to Jess. "You don't want to make her sad, *do you*? This girl NEEDS this." The cashier relented, while grumbling.

Jess was completely overjoyed. She watched the crepe being made in front of her and everything that went into it. She was fascinated. She could almost put this entire day behind her. In no time at all, the crepe was done and she started to chow down. Ran grabbed the tea-flavored drink for her. She still didn't know why people liked these drinks so much, but her friends had told her that the tapioca balls, milk, and flavoring made for a tasty combination. As for Jess, after she finished her crepe, she moved close to Ran. "Thanks so much for cheering me up, lady," she said, then smooched the girl's cheek, surprising her. This enraged Conan, who still had a crush on Ran and was a bit possessive. After he thought about it rationally, he realized that Jess only gave her a kiss *as a sign of respect*, nothing more, nothing less. He quickly realized he was jumping to conclusions. He was right. Jess was grateful to Ran. If she hadn't been there, she might have stayed in the bathroom stall for hours.

As time went on, Ran told her that they had to go. Jess understood. She quickly realized she leave as soon as possible so she could feel better. She might come back to Baltimore some day, but she'd never enter that pavilion ever again. As Conan, Kogoro, and Ran walked out of the pavilion, they prepared to travel to the closest police station. They could share their conclusions about the perp. Jess caught up with them. Conan was still somewhat suspicious of her. In contrast, Ran didn't mind and Kogoro tried to be friendly. While yawning a bit, as he was tired for some reason, and starting to suspect he had a case of narcolepsy, Kogoro grinned. "Thanks, little lady for helping us. We couldn't have done it without you." Jess smiled happily. He liked her so much more than that little far-too-curious brat, Conan.

Once outside and walking along the promenade, a man approached them with a brochure in his hand. "Hi, I'm Dustin Everyman with the Downtown Partnership. Do you want to know about the wonderful plan to revitalize this area with a multifamily development, shops, and stores?" The others didn't care. However, Jess took him up on his offer. "Yes, mister, I'd be happy to to learn more." He told her about how in November 2024, over 127,000 Baltimoreans had greenlit, in a ballot referendum, the demolition of two pavilions that comprised Harborplace: the Light Street Pavilion (where she had just been) and the Pratt Street Pavilion. They'd be replaced with two apartment towers, one which was 32-stories tall and another which was 25-stories tall.

This plan had attracted a lot of controversy. The city's mayor, an educated Black man named Brandon Scott, had included it as part of his second term action plan. The city's Planning Commission allowed for the aforementioned towers as "part of a dramatic reboot of Baltimore's tourist epicenter." What the man didn't tell her was that this plan not only benefited yet another developer, in a city which had given tax subsidies to developers in the past, but that there were valid questions as to how, and when, this would actually happen. The planned "transformation" had run into issues. There were questions as to whether it would bring the promised economic development or not, especially after the Renaissance Baltimore Hotel sold at a foreclosure auction after its owner defaulted on a multi-million dollar loan, and the main developer, David Bramble, was having a hard time getting $500 million dollars from investors. He had complained that investors didn't want to give him money because they thought Baltimore was like David Simon's popular crime drama, *The Wire*, ignoring the fact that possible investors could look at the decline of Harborplace for over 20 years and not want to invest *for that reason*.

Before they parted, Ran wrote down her number on a sheet of paper and handed it to Jess. She whispered "call me *any time* you have any issues. I'd be happy to listen." This ticked off Conan until Jess quickly disarmed it. She wasn't the best with social interactions, although she could see that Conan was jealous. She wasn't sure why Conan, considering the age gap of at least ten years between him and Ran. If she had know the truth behind Conan, and why he hadn't revealed anything to Ran about who he really was, it would all make sense. Of course she didn't know that, nor did Ran or Kogoro, due to the best efforts of the little detective. "Thanks! I'm so glad to have *a new friend*." Conan's jealousy faded as he realized he had read too much into it yet again. He was reassured. He was unaware that something within Ran was brewing, something which would disrupt their connection with one another.

As for Jess, she was pleased Ran had agreed to be her friend. Perhaps she could even rely upon Ran when times were hard. She fidgeted, drumming her fingers against her sides, then

bouncing them against her legs, and then tapping her fingers as she moved her legs. She was so pleased. Her heart was pounding so loudly. She couldn't believe this had happened to her. With everything she'd gone through that day, this seemed like a good end to it all. What she did next would be up to her. She could do this. Her chest felt warm. If she went through a rough patch, she could call on Ran. That's all she needed...

End Notes

In my original end notes for this fic, I noted that in the New 52 universe, Jess was completely traumatized when her two friends, who had joined her on a camping trip, were murdered in front of her by two mobsters, after they caught these men burying a body. She locked herself in her room/apartment for four years, developing crippling social anxiety and agoraphobia, shaping her as a character. I have no idea where MAWGL will go, in regard to this, but we do know, from the description from the casting call in 2025 that Jess will be a 14-15 year old Latina, who will be "betrayed by friends and bullied out of softball...[and is] chronically anxious...[with] fear, anxiety, and [a]...low opinion of herself." She was also called "lovable, relatable, plucky, overthinker, [and] ball of anxiety." Otherwise, very little is known about this series, although that hasn't stopped people from sharing their opinions that the series is "bad" somehow, in typical fandom jerkiness, likely by male fans who feel she is "ruining" what Jessica is "supposed to be" as a character.

This fic is also inspired, as I noted in my opening A/N, by my recent visit to Light Street Pavilion, and almost buying something at a store, I think "Crepe Lena Ice Cream & Funnel Cake," which is a tenant there, where since restaurants can still operate, despite the pending demolition in the fall of this year.

It is also very loosely inspired by some of the dialogue in "coin check" by KestralWatcher, which is one of the only stories out there to mention Inner Harbor by name, as a fic "Inner Harbor; Inner Thoughts", by MJM155 (orphan_account), is about a fictional Inner Harbor in Gotham, not the one in Baltimore. In addition, the fic "Inner Harbor" (by Coffee_Hound) isn't about Baltimore's Inner Harbor either. Some have said that Inner Harbor has "life" while Harborplace doesn't, and I would say they are right. I'm not sure I agree that the area is on the "precipice of great change," as that is overstating things.

Otherwise, I looked at the fics about Jess having anxiety, and while "Living in the Limelight" (ongoing, by DMenace), "before the new anxiety set in" (by crookedspoon), "One Summer Changed A Forever" (by sir_carebearalot) are good but not what I was looking for. At the same time, fics like "Adrift" (by rosecake), "hand to heart" (by nonbinaryezrabridger), and The Sleeping Mouri wakes up. (by Dagron) were a slight inspiration.

Prior to the publication of this fic I found that one writer, DarrenKhosasi_2026, had written a fic entitled "The Life and Times of Jessica Cruz" (currently two chapters) which said, in part, "This version of Jessica Cruz is based on her incarnation from My Adventures with Superman. I know there's an upcoming series based on her too, but I decided to make one myself so I can explore the DC world and make my own spin to it." Otherwise, none of the other 560+ fics on here, which have Jess as a character seem to focus on her as she is portrayed in MAWS, as far as I can tell.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!